

From victim to survivor

by Senior Airman Jette Carr
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4/15/2013 - **CANNON AIR FORCE BASE, N.M.** -- Every 2 minutes, someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted. This finding by the U.S. Department of Justice's 2006-2010 National Crime Victimization Survey further summed up that an average of 207,754 people become victims of rape and sexual assault each year.

At Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., several resources are available to those who have been victimized, such as the Sexual Assault Prevention Office's victim advocates program.

"You basically become that person's support system," said 1st Lt Sevrena Stewart, 27th Special Operations Force Support Squadron readiness and plans officer in charge and victim advocate. "Every case will be different, based on the victim's needs. If they need somebody to talk to, then you're that person. They don't always want to talk, but they might need help finding the services that are the best choice for them - that becomes your job."

"Our goal is to take them from victim status to survivor status," she said. "We ask them what they want and try to do it to them on their terms - give them that power back."

To become a victim advocate, each volunteer must have recommendations from their supervisor and commander. After they go through an interview process with the SARC, the training begins. Victim advocacy training lasts 40 hours and involves specialized instruction from sexual assault nurse examiners, the Office of Special Investigations, Judge Advocate General and other pertinent agencies.

"In the past two years, Department of Defense leadership has really been spotlighting this program to show people what it does," said Senior Master Sgt. Thressa Burley, 27th Special Operations Aerospace Medicine Squadron superintendent and victim advocate. "The program is still growing, but it's going to take a big mentality change for people to feel like we're actually here to help them. There are a lot of victims who think we can't do anything for them, and that's not true. There are many perpetrators who think they can get away with it and that's not always true either. As the culture starts changing, I'd like to see this program make an even bigger impact."

To volunteer as a victim advocate, contact the Sexual Assault Prevention Office at 575-784-7272.

"You have to get into it for the right reasons," said Burley. "It's not about recognition. You should be doing it to make a difference for someone who really needs you - that's the biggest part of being an advocate. If you're able to fully give of yourself for that person, you're increasing their chances of fully recovering."